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TAGS: ELAB UK GE
SUBJECT: "LARGEST HEALTH SERVICE STRIKE IN 20 YEARS" MORE OF A DAMP SQUIB

Sensitive but unclassified. Not for internet.

¶1. (U) Unionized workers at the UK's National Health Service's supply arm, NHS Logistics, began the first of two 24 hour strikes late on September 21 to protest the sale of the public sector entity to the German logistics giant, DHL. NHS Logistics supplies thousands of non-pharmaceutical supplies to the NHS, from cleaning supplies to medical equipment, latex gloves, bedpans and food.

¶2. (SBU) Although touted in the press as the largest work stoppage at the NHS in 20 years, that's not saying much. In all, 900 workers are affected, two thirds of whom voted in the strike ballot organized by their representative, the giant public sector union Unison. Of that those that voted, 74% approved the strike action, or just about one half of the unionized workers. Rod Robertson, national director of the general political fund of Unison, told LabCouns the two one-day actions are not intended to affect operations, because stockpiles at hospitals are ample, but simply to get the NHS to "back off and change course". He also noted that all the workers would initially be guaranteed protection of their jobs when the transfer occurred, under UK labor legislation.

¶3. (U) NHS will not discuss the specifics of the sale, citing "commercial confidentiality." According to press reports, Unison has dropped plans to challenge the sale in court, because they had little hope of success.

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